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ROBERT BLATCHFORD

Essays of To-day and Yesterday

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ESSAYS OF
TO-DAY AND YESTERDAY

ROBERT
BLATCHFORD



GEORGE G. HARRAP & CO. LTD.
LONDON CALCUTTA SYDNEY

First published 1927
by GEORGE G. HARRAP & CO. LTD.
39-41 Parker Street, Kingsway, London, W.C.2

Printed in Great Britain at THE BALLANTYNE PRESS by
SPOTTISWOODE, BALLANTYNE & CO. LTD.
Colchester, London & Eton

INTRODUCTORY NOTE

OLD controversies die hard, but there are few who will allow the memory of past strife to blind them to the indubitable fact that in Robert Blatchford we have a master of clear, nervous English prose at its best. One is tempted to begrudge the time spent in the dusty arena of polemics and to wish that it could have been devoted to the pure service of letters. Yet it is an idle thought. The fact that Robert Blatchford has been so alive to the needs of his own day as he saw them and yet could appraise so acutely the literary accomplishment of other days is a sufficient disproof of the heresy that literature is something quite remote from practical affairs. "Nunquam" (the pen-name by which he is affectionately known to so many readers) has never turned his back on the crowd and withdrawn into cloistered seclusion. Whatever concerns his fellow-man has concerned him. And the sturdy independence which characterizes all his judgments has never been shown more clearly than when he has been championing a forlorn hope, whether literary or political.

With whimsical frankness he has set down "Nowhere" as the place of his education: he should have said "Everywhere." For he has had a long life, very rich in all manner of experiences, from which he has drawn the utmost. He was born in 1851. He served his time at brushmaking, and then enlisted in the Dublin Fusiliers. After that he joined the staff of *The Sunday Chronicle*, and in 1891 founded *The Clarion*,

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a weekly whose unique qualities have wrung admiration from friend and foe alike. And when this doughty warrior settles down in expansive mood to tell of his experiences with men or books you may be sure that you have a literary feast before you.

F. H. P.

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BOGEY

IN the battle zone of Picardy, in the year 1910, which was exactly four years before the outbreak of the Great War, I met a very interesting and remarkable old man. He was a famous French journalist, and was well known and much liked in Paris. I say he was much liked, although no one told me so, for I do not believe anyone who knew him could help liking him. My youngest daughter, who was with me at the time, loved him before the end of the first day, and, though we only spent some three or four days in his company, loves him still and will love him always.

We saw him first at the Hôtel France et Angleterre, at Beauvais. We were in the little writing-room, and he stood in the courtyard talking with our host. I think he must have been asking who I was, and having learned he doubtless asked if I spoke French, for I saw him shrug his shoulders, and after a kind of wistful glance at our window he went away.

I wonder now, can I describe his appearance? He was short of stature, clean shaven, with iron-grey hair. He reminded us both of two very different men: Henry Irving and Napoleon Bonaparte, for in feature and what I may call habit of visage he resembled both. In general effect, again, he was at once an actor and a soldier. He had the Napoleonic poise of figure, and, with his hat low on the brow and his straight-cut grey raincoat open in front, suggested the well-known pictures of the great Emperor. Perhaps I might say he suggested Napoleon disguised as Henry Irving. His

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face was intellectual, shrewd but thoughtful; it was full of character and of humour, and his keen dark eyes sparkled with irony and kindness. Of course I did not see all this in that first brief glance, I don't pretend to be as clever as that. And I will add here a fact. I only learned some years later that the man I am describing was of the type and much in the likeness of the famous French artist Corot.

We did not expect to see the distinguished-looking Frenchman again, and we retired early, wondering who he might be. And in the morning we got up at four o'clock to catch the train for the Headquarters of the Grand Manceuvres, and just as the signal sounded for the start the door of our compartment was thrown open, and, assisted by a porter and the guard, there climbed in the wonderful old gentleman who within a few hours was to make upon both our minds so ineffaceable an impression.

He was more like Napoleon than ever, and yet he had also an air as of some quaint, original figure out of Andersen's *Fairy Tales*. He climbed in with his black bag, his stout stick, his field-glasses, and a curious air cushion in the shape of a lifebuoy. On this cushion, after saluting us both with a fine and graceful courtesy, he seated himself in his corner, and no sooner was he seated than he turned to Dolly and asked her, rather anxiously, I thought, if she spoke French. Dolly did speak French, but she is abnormally shy and would almost as lief sing a comic song as utter a French sentence aloud.

Then I played the Roman father. I said: "Hang it all, Dolly, be a man. Play the game. Parleyvoo to old Bogey. Ask him if he knows where I can hire a motor-car."

BOGEY

So Dolly parleywood, and Monsieur Bogey, for by that name did we ever afterwards speak of him together, very kindly asked us to share his car, and we accepted gratefully, and settled terms easily, and thus were we launched upon the great adventure: our Sentimental Journey.

Bogey showed us the sights of the town, and then took us to his hotel and went with us to lunch. And here he began at once to reveal himself. He was a gourmand: not a mere gross, heavy eater, like a German, but an eager, critical, discriminating, hearty diner, like many a Frenchman of his years. When he saw the tables well spread, with the wine-glasses and the flowers, and the waiters bearing well-filled dishes, he rubbed his hands and smiled, emitting at the same time a soft, unctuous gurgle, much like our old fat duck on a warm and wormy morning. Bogey's attitude towards the pleasures of the table was, in fact, that of a healthy, greedy schoolboy. He went about the business in a leisurely but purposeful way, taking every course in its turn, and invariably finishing with a bunch of small white grapes, which he washed in a tumbler of water. And I may say here that we never saw Bogey excited, and we never saw him in a hurry. Nor, in his pre-occupation with the viands, did he once forget his guests. He pressed his attentions upon us, and we both laughed heartily at his consternation when we refused a dish and when finally we pulled up half-way over the course. "But," he said, with grave concern, "the meal is only just begun," and even as he spoke he reached out and seized the arm of a waiter who was passing him unserved. He must have eaten at that one meal more than both of us could manage in a day. His look of

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sly triumph when the arrested waiter grinned over the dish afforded the French officers and correspondents great joy.

The next morning we went with him in his taxi to the front. The driver was tall and fair, with cool grey eyes and a satirical mouth. He laughed covertly at Monsieur Bogey. Indeed, everybody laughed at him or with him. Hardly did he speak to an officer, a sentry, or peasant, or an innkeeper, but he left them laughing. He had the gift of pleasing men and making them merry. As for Dolly, she laughed under his nose, she laughed consumedly, and I think he guessed what she was laughing at, for he would often turn a twinkling dark eye her way and smile.

He had no English, at least but a few words. When he met us he said every morning "Good-bye" by way of greeting. When the taxi stopped anywhere and he wished us to alight, he got out, held the door open, and said to Dolly, "Weel you, mees?" If Dolly spoke to him in French and asked him if he understood he would answer proudly in his English, "Pairfactly well"; and he had another piece, when he wanted her to ask me anything, he would say, or rather sing: "*Voulez-vous speakee votre père?*"

As we bowled along in the taxi he would point to some marching troops and say to me, "*L'Armée Rouge!*" and perhaps an hour later he would give a surprised stare at some passing cavalry or guns, and with raised brows would call across to me, "*Ah! l'Armée Bleu.*" When we were near the fighting he watched every movement intently, standing like the great Corsican, "arms locked, legs parted wide," and would look like some wise and keen old crow perched above

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a rabbit-warren. Then, as the smoke-rockets went up to show the artillery positions, he would lead us back to the carriage, give the driver his directions, and remark to Dolly, in French, "After that we will dine a little."

On the second day out, when we had for a companion a jolly young officer of Reserve, in mufti, and with his hat tied down with string (imagine a British plain-clothes officer with his hat corded down like a cork of a 'stone ginger'!), we went for dinner to an inn in a great square, in a village the name of which I have forgotten, and here Bogey excelled himself, and Dolly and I and the Reserve lieutenant laughed until our heads ached.

In the dining-room the table was not laid. Bogey found a tablecloth in a drawer and spread it. Then he found some knives and forks, and he and the lieutenant set them out. And as he laid each knife and fork or spoon or plate on the table Bogey ejaculated a little "Ah!" of pleasure and satisfaction. I have always said he and the lieutenant ought to have done it to music from *L'Enfant Prodigue*. And soon the dishes and the bottles appeared, and we dined. Sacred name of a Gargantuan, how Bogey did dine! And when Dolly and I refused our portion of meat he, after decent expostulation, divided it between himself and the young officer, and it disappeared. Oh, it was a good dinner, and it lasted an hour and a half, and then Monsieur Bogey called for the bill.

We saw at once that something was wrong. We learnt later that Bogey had pointed out to the landlady that she had charged four portions of meat, and we had not eaten ours. To which the landlady had replied that as monsieur and his friend had eaten the four portions

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four must be paid for. "That, monsieur," she said, "it is but just."

Then ensued an argument I would not have missed for worlds. Bogey, standing, as one of the Old Guard on parade, poured out a stream of eloquence without pause or heat. The lady—she was tall and fair and spare—spoke like the divine Sarah in tragedy, emphasizing her points by raising and lowering her arms in a stiff and rapid angular way, like the action of a hen beating her wings. Bogey was obstinate and unmoved; Madame was indignant, vociferous, and determined. Once she turned and trotted off swiftly to her kitchen. Bogey, still talking, followed her, and Dolly and I and the young officer dropped out of the open window on to the pavement and laughed like hyenas.

I think Bogey lost. Dolly thinks he lost. He came out looking like a batsman who is bowled in his first over. Calm, collected, resigned, but not radiant. But it was a great fight.

I have not space to do Monsieur Bogey full justice. He struck me as one of those rare souls who retain their ideals and young enthusiasms. I feel sure he loved poetry and music; that he was capable of heroism and the finest chivalry. One could not imagine him as acting or speaking coarsely, or rudely, or with malice. He tempered a shrewd frugality with generosity. His face was instinct with character and humour and a natural *bonhomie*. He was always quiet and polite. He treated Dolly with a charming, almost tender, courtesy which quite disarmed her shyness. We were greatly disappointed when I was suddenly called home, and had to leave our new-old friend without so much as an adieu or a shake of the hand.

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In 1914, being in Paris, I went to the office of his paper to carry out a long-cherished plan. I went to take Monsieur Bogey out and stand him the dinner of his lifetime. And when I asked for him by his honourable name I got the unexpected and staggering answer: "*Ah, monsieur, il est mort.*"

He was dead. He had been dead two years. I could never drink good wine with him, nor convey to him our sentiments of affectionate respect. He had not lived, the staunch old patriot, to see the great war of liberation, nor to rejoice in the glory of the French Army he loved so well. But over in England there is an English girl with a French heart; a girl whose patron saint is Joan of Arc, whose Celestial City is Rouen, and in her remembrance is enshrined the romantic and merry figure of the knightly and childlike Monsieur Croquemitaine. "The dear old thing," so she speaks of him with a deeper sympathy and a softer tenderness as the years go by. Against the time when she will be old herself she will have so embroidered his memory that he will have become for her a legendary saint and hero, compact of all the humours, wisdoms, graces, and innocent frailties of the Right-Counselling Nestor and Friar John of the Funnels. For thus do love and laughter build up line by line the mighty figure of a lusty Bacchus or benevolent Hermes of the Ways.

THE GARDEN OF PROSERPINE

THERE have been many stubborn battles in and around Bray, yet as we stood in the public square, where the guard of honour was drawn up before the church, we were surprised to find the church standing and only a few of the houses badly broken. But, of course, the village was deserted. We had not seen one village since leaving Amiens in which a house was occupied or in which a single civilian could be met. Indeed, all the villages until we came to Bray were heaps of ruins, or, in many cases, heaps of dust and rubble and broken brick and tile.

In the Somme fighting of 1916 a dear young friend of mine was mortally wounded. As I had heard that this lovable young Englishman was buried in Bray Churchyard I resolved that now I had so unexpectedly reached the village I would try to find his grave.

I asked an Australian soldier if there were a graveyard attached to the church, and found there was none. I then asked a sergeant if there was a cemetery in Bray, and he said, "Yes. Past the church and straight on by the road. You will see it on your left." So while Mr Hughes was speaking from the Town Hall balcony I set off on my quest.

As I walked I saw that the part of the village beyond the church had suffered severely. Walls were broken or knocked down, roofs had been blown out or battered in, the paths were blocked with *débris*, the roads torn up by shell fire, ricks burnt, barns gutted, and hardly

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a door or a window left intact. There had been terrible times in the once peaceful and pretty village of Bray.

And then I saw the wall and the gate of the cemetery on the left of the shell-torn road with the tottering and deserted ruins all around it. One gate was half open, hanging on a broken hinge, and through it I glimpsed the dark shadows, the sombre trees, and the bleak white crosses of the Garden of Proserpine. I hung back for a moment, then, pulling myself together, I took off my hat and walked in.

It was the loneliest and the most melancholy place I ever stood in. Imagine it! Deserted, neglected, strewn thick with fallen leaves, with the sad scent of autumn in the air, with the grass uncut and the poor wreaths rotting. Then there were the signs of the battle. I don't think the cemetery had been wilfully shelled, but it had caught the spume and spray from the seas of fire that had beaten the surrounding houses into wreckage. The cemetery walls were gashed and scarred, and in places perforated. The coping was damaged. Some of the headstones were split, and monuments knocked down. Dud shells lay here and there in the rank grass. Shrapnel had cut the branches of the overgrown trees, so that many hung down over the leafy and damp pathways, and their withered leaves rustled stiffly as they brushed my face or limbs in passing. It must have been a horrible sight when the houses were burning and the roofs and walls falling and the guns thundering and the shells bursting and the shrapnel and the bullets wailing and screaming. As I tried to reconstruct the scene and the noise I thought of the dead in Sir Thomas Browne's essay who had lain

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so quietly "under the drums and tramplings of three conquests"; and of the dead in Swinburne's poem:

Wind wherein seas and stars are shaken
Shall shake them, and they shall not waken ;
None that has lain down shall arise.

It was a French cemetery, and in it were no English dead. Amongst the great family vaults and the lichened and bullet-scarred headstones of the older graves there were many of the plain white wooden crosses which marked the resting places of French officers and men who had died in this awful war. And I noticed that the old graves and the new, the graves of those who had died in their beds in the cottages or *châteaux* of Bray, and of those who had fallen with arms in their hands in the desperate Somme fighting, all had the same neglected, desolate air. This Garden of Proserpine seemed very, very old and very damp and dark, and the poor dead seemed so utterly deserted and forgotten. Here and there a rose-tree had straggled across a tomb and dropped its delicate amber or coral petals on the weatherbeaten, war-scarred stone. But there were few flowers to be seen, and, though the trees had grown almost into a wood, there was not a bird's note, not even the sharp, plaintive song of a robin, to be heard. It was the very dimmest, dumbest, and most mournful place of burial I had ever seen. It was a hushed, dark garden wherein death seemed ominously cold and real and near. A wounded and neglected garden of the dead in the midst of the deserted and dead village: "a very home of tears."

I turned away with a heavy heart and a troubled mind, and as I walked back along the mad nightmare of a street I heard the voice of the colonel from the

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square: "Guard: slope arms. Form fours, right. By the left, quick march." The Australian battalion was starting for the front. Only a few miles away the dull boom of the guns and the fleecy balls of shrapnel against the sky marked the now ebbing tide of invasion. As I heard the tramp of the feet I glanced back at the dim white crosses of the dead French soldiers and thought how *they* had marched away.

I did not find the last home of our dear young English boy. I had now no time to seek. The cars were ready to start. The Australians were thronging round to cheer their Prime Minister. There was a noise of shouting, a waving of hats and hands, and we were once more rushing along the dusty roads.

The others talked with animation of the battle, of the Boche aeroplane, of Mr Hughes' speech, of the glorious weather. But I sat mum in my corner thinking of the deserted Garden of Proserpine, and the battered monuments, and the withered leaves, and the little white crosses over those brave Frenchmen who would return no more.

Nothing I have seen in France has left upon my mind an impression so deeply sad as the cemetery of Bray-sur-Somme.

THE PANTILES

THROUGHOUT the prosaic workaday hours the Pantiles is no more than a bazaar or lounge, the haunt of leisured shoppers and voluptuous connoisseurs in "cates and dainties fine."

But on band nights, when the shops are closed, the ghostly light of the moon, the pale yellow shine of the lamps, and the coloured bulbs sparkling round the pagoda produce a soft atmospheric mystery and glamour. Then the musky twilight palpitates with amorous music, and youths and maidens throng the old foot-worn causeway, where fantastic leaf-patterns dance in flickering embroideries on wall and pavement; and our Pantiles sheds its materialism, and becomes an enchanted garden, a promenade of Al Raschid, a street of adventure luminous with star-dust and dim as dreams.

Or, as Councillor Perks expressed it: "When the Pantiles clothes itself in moonshine and music it's a kind of fool's Paradise, or clearing-house for impish Eros."

Old Mr Perks, incorrigible bookworm and dreamer, was of those who live their lives as foreigners among their own people. Niggardly and curt of speech, with thoughtful frown and close-pursed lips, yet keen to pounce upon a bargain, he held his small world at a distance. Such was his humour. Why wear his heart upon his sleeve? A solitary bachelor, stricken in years, he had his own amusements, and one of them was to look on at the comedy of life, in which, he felt, he no longer played a part.

THE PANTILES

The blended and contrasting lights suffused the Pantiles with a glowing, scented haze, in which a myriad motes of gold and colour scintillated. Along the raised pavement a shadowy crowd moved slowly. The drifting figures passed and re-passed, some loitering in little groups to gossip, some coalescing in silhouetted clusters dark against the cloudy glare.

Old Perks lounged as usual at his open first-floor window, smoking his long clay pipe, and gazing in reverie upon the kaleidoscopic scene below.

Under his watchful eyes grey shadow-shapes, touched here and there with glints of light or hints of colour, moved rhythmically. Like a hushed symphony the blended sounds arose: soft rustle of skirts, sibilant lisp of feet, leafy whisper of voices, and, leaping through them, ever and anon, like the tinkle of sudden bells, the sweet surprise of girlish laughter.

Councillor Perks talked to himself in a half-articulate mumble. "Ambiguous influence, music. All these young pups and pussies are floating in step to that beckoning waltz. It's a replica of the music o' the spheres: swarms o' suns pirouetting round a hypnotic centre, all in time, with the Milky Way as their celestial Pantiles.

"Yes. Music's an enigma, and so is woman. Bodies without souls they call them in the Orient, and we Westerns reverse the theory; we idealize them, we make believe the minxes are souls without bodies, incarnated moonbeams, ice-maidens coldly chaste. Very pretty. But they love music and dancing and perfume and colour, all sensuous things; and they are always hungry: never knew a woman who wasn't hungry, or would own she was. Besides—their eyes.

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Why, the brown, velvet eyes of a Honolulu girl will speak Hindustani, or Portuguese, or English, or double-Dutch well enough for any man to understand.

"Walking, too, the hussies, with a twinkling of the feet, as they did in Babylon.

"There you go, little golden-polled paroquet, giggling. What do they find to giggle about? It's just 'the universal breath of spring that turns their blood to wine.' They were so of old, or ever the sons of the Achaeans came to Ilion.

"These chits of girls toss laughter to their beaux as they might toss roses; and the lads carry their cheap canes as the Greek peasants carried peach-rods starred with flowers.

"They've been mincing and glissading, and ogling and smirking, and swapping eyes with striplings in the Pantiles for centuries: all the years since the old place was built. And what was it built *for*? Run up a line of shops, plant a row of trees, open a pagoda, and hire a band, anywhere, anywhere in the five continents, and you get—*this*. But 'soft you now, the fair Ophelia.' Here's a young couple out o' the ark: they're going to toy with Olympic fire, and tempt the gods."

A pair of dim, slim figures halted in the shade, right under the old man's window. They stood so close together, boy and girl, they might have heard the pulsing of each other's hearts.

The girl spoke. "I like that waltz," she said, and the boy made answer: "*Do* you? So do I."

Ensued an eloquent silence, at the end of which the boy stroked the girl's muff timidly, and the girl said: "I must go now, Dicky. It's nearly ten."

"*Must* you?" the boy asked, then added, "I suppose

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you must"; but, the girl still lingering, he asked: "May I come too, Doris?"

Upon this the girl said, demurely, "Would you like to? Well, only to the end of the street." And, turning slowly, they melted away amongst the dawdling shadows.

Old Perks chuckled softly. "That's it," he said, "that's all they have to say, or ever do say. And they'll marry each other! Oh, those feckless plays and novels where the lovers spout decorative platitudes by the yard. Not a bit like it. No. It's a glance and a smile, and a whift o' scent, and the kiss of shy hands lingering. That's what plays the devil. 'Stabbed with a white wench's black eye.' So, so!"

"'Nice waltz,' she says. 'Yes,' says he. 'May I come, Doris?' 'Only to the end of the street.' What a comedy! It's a queer, long old street that. How many years since I wandered into it—and turned back?

"Pretty Molly. She had a nice face, and was no sillier than some who're counted wise. And here am I, a wintry old bogey, talking to myself—alone. And there's the money: in the bank. What is it? Dumb figures scrawled in a blind book. What use is it? None. And it's all I have to show for the roses I didn't gather while I might. Bah!

"You can't cheat the gods. And you can't change human nature. The new life follows the old. It's Meleager and Heliodora, tamarisks and delicate hyacinths, and water falling from the high face o' the rock. And what's Society, good my lord? May't please your lordship, just a commodity of magnolia-scented simulacra in silk hats. And Nature laughs; and Heliodora wins.

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" Every giggling little atom comes trailing clouds o' glory. A thousand years hence the descendants of these young rogues and hussies will be running the world; writing poems, winning battles, building bridges. Some o' them 'll be making love, and some o' them, poor devils, making money."

Mr Perks laid his long clay gently in its nook, closed his window, and found his hat and cane. " I'll step down," he said, " and take a turn in the Pantiles. ' I like that waltz.' Ha! Well, it's a warm and tender night, and it does a little old fool good to mix with the little young fools, and see what a lot they get from life for nothing. Wish I had some of the priceless stuff they get for nothing—in the bank. I'd draw some staggering cheques."

He hobbled down the steps, and began to move slowly with the crowd. And the girls giggled, and the boys prattled, and the band played, and the old moon smiled her bland, satiric smile—the smile she gave to the cave men, and to Semiramide, and to the Greek girl poet, rival of Sappho, who set down in song: "*Nothing is sweeter than love, and all delicious things are second to it.*"

A true saying, young Nossis of the honeyed lips, and you might have added: " Men may not hoard up youth or love in banks."

THE ART OF DEFOE

I HAD been reading some nice new books by some smart young men and had not found them very thrilling, so that I fell back on the standard authors, and, after one or two nibbles, sat down to re-read *Captain Singleton*. I have not read *Captain Singleton* for some years, and I wondered whether he would have lost his grip. He has not. I read the book right through, and enjoyed it more than ever before.

This book, besides being very typical of Defoe's genius, is remarkable in many ways. Like *Robinson Crusoe* and *Moll Flanders*, it captures the reader's attention on the first page and holds it tenaciously until the end, and it does this without any of the expedients of the modern popular novel.

Like *Robinson Crusoe*, *Captain Singleton* is a novel not only of adventure but of endeavour. In both stories Defoe holds the interest of his readers by a fascinating account of the contrivances and the labours of certain ordinary men in the face of great difficulties and dangers. Singleton and his companions have to build canoes and houses, to cross wide seas, to hunt animals and cure meat, and to protect themselves against wild beasts and hostile savages. In addition to this they undertake and accomplish a great march of over 2000 miles through the heart of darkest Africa. This march, which began near the mouth of the river Rufiji, took them across German East Africa, the Congo State, and the Gold Coast to Angola, and to it the greater part of the first half of the book is devoted. The second half,

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in which Captain Singleton becomes a pirate, is not so engrossing.

There is no love interest in *Captain Singleton*. Indeed, there is only one woman in the book, and she does not appear until within a few pages of the end.

There is no 'descriptive writing,' such as we find in most modern novels. Defoe never describes the sea, or the sky, or the landscape. Certainly he does mention in a matter-of-fact way that the sea was violent or calm, or that the travellers entered upon a horrible, vast desert, or that they passed a wild forest, or some prodigious high hills, but that is all. He never seems to have noticed the clouds or the stars. He appears to have been almost colour-blind and to have had no feeling for the picturesque.

He treats his characters as curtly as his scenery. He does not tell us of a single person in *Captain Singleton* whether he was tall or short, stout or lean, dark or fair, handsome or plain. He will tell us that a certain man was English, or Dutch, or Portuguese, or that he was a good sailor, or a surly fellow, but he goes no farther. No. With Defoe "the play's the thing," and the scenery and actors do not matter.

Now it is one of the striking peculiarities of this book that these sketchy figures are human and alive; not only are they alive, but their characters are distinctly indicated by their language and their acts. This is the case with the doctor and the gunner and the pirate captain, Wilmot, as well as with William the Quaker, who is the hero of the second half of the story. William is a striking personality, but we never know what he looked like. He was a Quaker, a surgeon, and a dry, clever fellow, that is enough for Defoe.

THE ART OF DEFOE

There is no admirable person, no heroic figure in the book. Defoe never drew heroes. All his women and men are flesh and blood, and most of them are a long way below the angels. Defoe never idealized. No. His favourite plan was to get a few rough and imperfect men into some kind of a mess and then hold his reader's interest by telling how they got out of it. In *Captain Singleton*, the only honest and reputable character is the sister of William the Quaker, who is a minor character and upon whom Defoe does not waste a single word of description.

The book is thoroughly English. That is to say, it is restrained, practical, and confined to a recital of deeds and facts. There is a prodigious amount of eating and drinking, and more space is given to detailed accounts of manual work than in any modern book with which I am acquainted.

The style is Defoe's choice for books of this class. That is to say, it is the style of an intelligent but uneducated sailor. It is perfectly natural, quite clear, and destitute of any literary frills or graces.

No love interest, no woman; no good nor even nice people; no eloquent nor beautiful writing; no descriptions of dress, of scenery, nor of persons; no plot; no acts of outstanding heroism or genius; no indication of a sailor's love for his ship, nor of an Englishman's love of his country; no fine sentiments, nor noble motives, nor generous desires; no stars, no flowers, no children, and, in the first half of the story, no humour. Nothing but the adventures of a gang of piratical ruffians in unknown regions of Africa, and yet *Captain Singleton* is an excellent story, and I wish it were in twenty volumes.

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Not that I am prepared to dispense with all that Defoe left out of his books. At least, not in the case of any other author. Henry James is Henry James, Joseph Conrad is Joseph Conrad, John Galsworthy is John Galsworthy, R. D. Blackmore is R. D. Blackmore. Yes, and, by the Lord Harry, Daniel Defoe is Daniel Defoe: a great story-teller, a great inventor, a great artist, and an original genius.

Defoe has been called a realist. He was a realist in so far as that his genius created the illusion of reality. But, after what I have said above about this book, it is quite evident that Defoe put more imagination into his books than many famous authors, and that he left more to the imagination of his readers.

Few artists have so well concealed their art; but Defoe was a great artist.

IN THE TRAIN

I WAS wambling along on the railway one winter's day when a parson entered the carriage and took the corner opposite mine. He was tall and slim, with a demurely humorous smile and bright, twinkling eyes, and as he sat down he began to talk. "Do you notice, sir," he said in a pleasant voice, "how abnormally clean the windows are these days?"

I said I had not remarked it, and added that I was not of an observant nature.

"N—o?" said the parson. "You look, if you will pardon the remark, more like a thinker."

I gave an assenting shrug. "Thinking," said I, "is like all bad habits, it grows on one."

"H'm!" said the parson, "I did not suggest that you were in the habit of thinking evil. But as you do think I venture to opine that now your attention has been directed to the novel phenomenon of well-cleaned windows you will readily associate the effect with the cause."

I shook my head.

"Come, come, my dear sir," said the parson, "we are at war; and we have clean windows. One effect of the war has been to withdraw railway workers for military service. The places of those men—— You smile. You anticipate my conclusion. The windows shine in pristine purity because they have been cleaned by women."

I said: "Excellent, my dear Holmes, excellent," and the parson produced a briar pipe. Having filled the pipe and got it going, he resumed his discourse.

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“Whatever laxity of opinions theological we may permit ourselves in these heretical days,” he said, “I think we must admit that when God gave Adam in his loneliness a woman companion God did very well.”

“I always understood, sir,” said I, “that Adam was less grateful than, no doubt, he should have been.”

“Love,” said the parson, “is a—ha—love is somewhat of an adventure, but marriage, as I am sure you will acknowledge (for I perceive that you are a married man), marriage is an art. Now, Adam was an amateur: a tyro. Adam had not the benefit of the accumulated wisdom of many generations of sensible, comfortable husbands; nor had he the spur of the recorded blunders and follies of innumerable cynics. My contention is, sir, that Adam was more blessed than he knew. And, really, there have been millions of his seed of whom the same might be very properly alleged. You will not pretend to be indifferent to the excellences of woman.”

I begged to dissociate myself from any such aspersion.

“And rightly, too,” said the parson, “the depreciation of woman is one of the most contemptible affectations to which man can descend. It is worse: it is a sin, a compound sin, a sin of vanity, malice, and ingratitude compact. It connotes a senseless littleness of mind. For who would dream of disparaging the constellations or being impertinent to the equator? One does not vent sour gibes against the British Navy, or the game of cricket, or a good Havana cigar. And what are those in comparison with the superlative boon which a beneficent Providence conferred upon Adam?

“We must not, however, in our modern arrogance, presume to censure Adam. No doubt Adam was very young, and he lived in a young world. Now, woman,

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sir, is an acquired taste." The parson beamed, twinkled, and puffed his pipe.

I asked what he meant by saying that woman is an acquired taste. "They say the same of olives," I said, "but I loved olives at first sight, and woman always."

"Yes, yes, yes," said the parson. "But now, tell me, don't you appreciate women more as you grow older? Don't women and girls surprise and delight you more now than they did when you were of a golden youth? I find that I have learned to appreciate their charm and goodness, to relish their piquancy, and to thank God more gratefully for their inspiration and loveliness as the years have sped. Why, you will know exactly what I mean if I say that any ordinary pleasant girl or woman lights up the dark places of the earth like a lamp. Is not that true? Think what a dance, a home, or a wedding would be without her."

I said that I agreed with the parson, and that I agreed with Robert Burns. I added that no gift of language was sufficient to enable a man to do justice to the most precious gift of the good God. "Women," I said, "are incomparable, because there is nothing to compare with them."

The parson smiled. "Well," he said, "and the fact that we learn with years the better to honour and renown her is sufficient compensation, were there no other, for growing old. But there are other and numerous compensations. Do you not find it so?"

I said—for this humorous parson was expressing my own thoughts—that I certainly found many advantages in growing old, and of drawbacks few.

The parson smiled; then the smile faded away and a thoughtful shadow clouded his mobile face. "That,"

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he said, "is good wisdom. Now, as one pursues this pilgrimage of life, the old friends, the boon companions, drop away. One by one, as the years wane, our dear ones leave us. So that before one attains the half-century, one looks back along the traversed road, and sees by the wayside many gravestones. That experience, I take it, is universal."

I said "Yes," and asked him if he ever lay between a sleep and a sleep and told over to himself the names or conjured up the faces of those beloved comrades who had fallen out on the march.

"I do," said the parson. "Yes. They are so many, now, our dear dead. Yet there is no despondency in the thought. And do you not think that our faith in a future meeting with those who have 'drunk their Cup a Round or two before' is the very best of all Christian apologetics?"

This was thin ice. I resolved upon a diversion. "Which would you choose," I asked, "to meet again the old friends and the old loves, or to wake up in a new planet to a new youth?"

"I have no hesitation," the parson began, but stopped. "Yes," he said, "I have—I have some considerable hesitation." He leaned back in his seat and smoked, and glanced at me from time to time with his bright, bird-like eyes, and smiled, and opened his lips to speak, and put his pipe again between them and did not speak; while I sat patient and impassive, as a man does who has made a good move in chess and knows that his opponent will need to think awhile. The parson was a candid soul. He would not evade a point; but he was deliberate, and would not hurry.

At last he spoke. "I must confess," he said, "that

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your question is less easy to answer than on its first impact I supposed. To meet the old friends and to re-create the past: there is a lure in that idea. Perhaps, also, the past is especially seductive to men somewhat stricken in years. Yet if a man's memory be green, and the glamour of his youth, though dimmed, has not yet wholly failed him, that other thought—that thought of yours, of a new youth in a new planet—has a fascination. To be a boy again: to have a bright, swift spirit, a horizon of tinted dreams, a hope like the dawn star, and an imagination like a string band playing pleasant tunes—why, what a tempting prospect! In a new planet too."

The parson's whimsical smile came back to his lips. "Is there," he asked, "is there permitted a free choice of planets?"

And as he spoke the train slowed down and a stentorian porter roared through our open window: "Change here for Chrononhotonthologos, Abrac-dabra, and Borrioboola-Gha!" or words of like mysterious import.

I changed.

SACKED

THE above title is perhaps too alarming. Nobody has been sacked by me, nor have I myself been sacked, but I have an uncomfortable premonition that, perhaps, “the Bird is on the Wing.”

It is thus. A certain anonymous, smart, original, young person has written an article in a very smart, original, young London newspaper in which he points the finger of scorn and reproach at the veterans who “lag superfluous on the stage” of life.

The world, Eugenius assures us, is governed by old men. This, he says, is bad for the world, and especially for the young men.

It has got to stop—not the world, but the senile government thereof—and he, and the bhoys, are out to stop it.

They propose to stop it in the new, young way, by means of legislation. There is to be a nice new Act, which will treat old men (of sixty-five) as “infants”; that is to say, as infants within the law.

They will be classified, the old dotards of sixty-five, as persons incapable, not only of managing the world, but of managing their own affairs.

They will not be allowed, in fact, to have any affairs. They will be compulsorily retired from business, and their property will be “administered for them,” by the smart young men.

Very well. I am turned seventy. Perhaps you think I am going to protest. Not at all. On the contrary, I am going to laugh.

SACKED

There was a time in the history of the race when the young had a short way with the old. They used to knock them on the head with a club, and bury them.

That rigorous practice fell into disuse. Why? I don't know. I have heard a reason given, but it may be an invention of some crafty old Struldbrug. I repeat it for what it is worth. It has been said, then, that some of the tribes found the old crocks useful as councillors. Perhaps some artful old greybeard of the cave period wangled his tribe out of a tight place. Perhaps as a negotiator, or a general, some bleary-eyed baldpate displayed a certain artfulness, born of wrinkled and sad experience, which earned him a reprieve.

If that is the fact it is quite conceivable that other old sly-boots would rumble the game, and, in the course of time, would establish the belief that wisdom is a wine that is "mellowed, not impaired by time." And so it has gone on until the world is governed by a parcel of baggy-eyed old dodderers, to the great wrong and discontent of the young braves.

Though years past the chill borderline of senility myself, I can yet sympathize with the young men. And why? Because I have been a young man myself.

Yes, incredible as it may seem, all the "lean and slippersed pantaloons" have once been young, though it is a common mistake of the young men to imagine that their elders were born old.

Youth has many advantages; but age has some. I have, for instance, this advantage over Eugenius, that, whereas he has never been seventy, I *have* been twenty-five. That is an advantage which Eugenius may regard heedlessly, or not at all; but it remains to me an asset.

The chief failing of the wambling old fossils of the

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race, according to Eugenius, is their miserable lack of 'push and go.' The charge is not wholly baseless. After the late forties one must admit one does not push so hard; one does not go so fast. No candid old relic of sixty-five will deny it.

But had Eugenius the advantage, while remaining twenty-five, of having once been sixty or seventy, he would know that it is possible to push too violently and to go with rashness.

It is, perhaps, a vanity of lumpish age that we fumbling old pedants, looking back on the darkening course of our own lives, are wont to ascribe most of our fooleries and failures to our inexperience, to the greenness and the impetuosity of youth, to the heedlessness of our going and the unconsidered avidity of our push.

We think to ourselves, in the pride of our decay, that if we could begin life again, with the advantage of what in our conceit we imagine to be our ripened wisdom and our valuable experience, we should avoid those pitfalls, and guard against those defects.

Conscious of our failing fire, we are prone to flatter ourselves that we have more knowledge, more prudence, and a larger charity than we had forty years ago.

We look back at our past, and we see that we have made blunders, that we have harboured illusions, that we have imagined vain things. We conclude from this knowledge that other young men commit blunders, harbour illusions, and imagine vain things.

One of the lessons most of us decrepit old ruins have learned is that it is a jolly good thing for a man that events do not always turn out in accordance with his desires, that one does not always get what one wants.

Now, I will venture to say that the sparkling

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Eugenius does not know what it means to thank his stars for a disappointment, or to heave sighs of relief over a bygone failure.

Most young men, and I perceive that Eugenius is of that kind, desire success, prosperity, and fame. But a good many old men have learnt that success, and prosperity, and fame are dangerous gifts of the gods. It is not every man who can 'stand corn.' Wealth and applause seldom make for happiness, and still more seldom do they make for the health of the soul.

Eugenius, if he has ever heard of me, will know that I am not what is called a religious man. But, lest he misjudge me, I will be so far intimate as to tell him that one of my best-loved and most honoured books is the Book of Common Prayer. The eloquence, the beauty, and the wisdom of the finest and most human parts of that wonderful book are, I make bold to claim, the utterances of old men.

I do not know who were the authors of that sweet bouquet of literary immortality, but I cannot, with my remembrance and observation of the young, believe that anything so charitable, so tender, and so wise could, in the nature of things, have been conceived or executed by men who had not lived long and learned and suffered much.

The Book of Common Prayer is one of the noblest, gentlest, manliest books in our language. It is, perhaps, the most English book we have, and is written in English which even Shakespeare has not excelled.

And I would respectfully point out to Eugenius that young England would never have inherited that priceless book had old England poleaxed her old men.

A man may be born wise; but he is never born

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experienced. He may be born sweet, but he is not born ripe. There comes to me, as I write, a line of a minor poet: "Those old masters who were strong, because they loved and suffered, and were weak." I commend that line to Eugenius.

Also, Eugenius, I laugh. You may pass an Act to make us old back-numbers "infants within the law." You may take our jobs and administer our affairs; but you will only be plagiarists of the cave men, and you will have to curb your hearts of fire as they had.

I tell you, Eugenius, we laugh at you. You cannot do without us. If you were older you would know it.

THE MERRY WIVES OF SYRACUSE

I AM not a theatre-goer, but I wish I had been one of the audience when two of the Idylls of Theocritus were presented as plays on the London stage. The Idylls given were the Second and Fifteenth. The Second is dramatic, but it must have been difficult to adapt it to the exigencies of the modern theatre. It has but a single scene and but two characters, one of whom is of minor importance and does not speak. The Idyll, then, is a monologue and a monologue with little action in it. Simaetha, deserted by her lover, is weaving spells and uttering incantations with the purpose of regaining his affection. There is no more than that; yet it would be effective, well acted and well staged. Readers will remember the poem by the aid of one brief quotation. I use the translation by Andrew Lang:

Even as I melt this wax, with the god to aid, so speedily
may he by love be molten, the Myndian Delphis! And as
whirls this brazen wheel, so restless, under Aphrodite's
spell, may he turn and turn about my doors.

My magic wheel, draw home to me the man I love.

The Fifteenth Idyll is a general favourite, and would afford a much better opportunity to the actor and stage manager. It is that poem in which two ladies of Syracuse, living in Alexandria, go to the great festival of the resurrection of Adonis. It has two scenes, and is full of bustle and animation. It contains a fine hymn or psalm to Adonis, and ought to play well. However, that by the way. What causes this Idyll to be a general favourite, and what has set me writing about it, is its

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startling modernity. Theocritus wrote nearly three hundred years before the Christian era. He was a Greek, native of Syracuse. The two Grecian ladies who are the principal characters in the Fifteenth Idyll, Gorgo and Praxinoë, are types of their sex and race as they existed two thousand two hundred years ago, and their vivacity, their prattle, their femininity are absolutely modern, and would be thoroughly appropriate to-day in London or in Paris. The eternal feminine defies the revolutions of empires and the stress of time. The Idyll opens thus:

CORGO. Is Praxinoë at home?

PRAXINOË. Dear Gorgo, how long is it since you have been here? She is at home. The wonder is that you have got here at last. Eunoë, see that she has a chair. Throw a cushion on it, too.

CORGO. It does most charmingly as it is.

PRAXINOË. Do sit down.

CORGO. Oh, what a thing spirit is! I have scarcely got to you alive, Praxinoë! What a huge crowd, what hosts of four-in-hands! Everywhere cavalry boots, everywhere men in uniform! And the road is endless: yes, you really live *too* far away!

This perfectly modern and feminine opening is followed by a few passages in which the ladies roast their absent husbands ("Even as you and I"). That wifely convention duly honoured, Madame Praxinoë washes her hands, scolds her maid, and proceeds to put on her 'things.' Then Gorgo resumes the dialogue:

CORGO. Praxinoë, that full body becomes you wonderfully. Tell me, how much did the stuff cost you just off the loom?

PRAXINOË. Don't speak of it, Gorgo! More than eight

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pounds in good silver money—and the work on it! I nearly slaved my soul out over it!

GORG. Well, it is *most* successful; all you could wish.

PRAXINOË. Thanks for the pretty speech! Bring my shawl, and set my hat on my head, the fashionable way! No, child, I don't mean to take you. Boo! Bogies! There's a horse that bites! Cry as much as you please, but I cannot have you lamed. Let us be moving. Phrygia, take the child, and keep him amused, call in the dog, and shut the street door.

When the two ladies and their maids get into the street, Madame Praxinoë continues her sprightly chatter:

PRAXINOË. Ye gods, what a crowd! How on earth are we ever to get through this coil? They are like ants, that no one can measure their number. . . . Here come the King's war horses! My dear man, don't trample on me. Look, the bay's rearing: see, what temper! Eunoë, you foolhardy girl, will you never keep out of the way?

GORG. Courage, Praxinoë. We are safe behind them, now, and they have gone to their station.

So they proceed, pushing, chattering, chiding, and laughing until they pass the doors. Then—

GORG. Do come here, Praxinoë. Look first at these embroideries. How light, and how lovely! We will call them the garments of the gods.

PRAXINOË. Lady Athene! What spinning women wrought them, what painters designed these drawings? So true they are! How naturally they stand and move, like living creatures; not patterns woven. What a clever thing is man! Ah, and himself—Adonis—how beautiful to behold he lies on his silver couch, with the first down on his cheeks, the thrice-beloved Adonis—Adonis beloved even among the dead!

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At this point, just when her enthusiasm has got into its stride, Madame Praxinoë is interrupted by a rude stranger of the inferior sex—not a Londoner of 1926, but a Greek of 300 B.C.

STRANGER. You weariful woman, do cease your endless cooing talk. They bore one to death with their eternal broad vowels.

CORGO. Indeed! And where may this person come from? What is it to you if we *are* chatterboxes? Give orders to your own servants, sir. Do you pretend to command ladies of Syracuse? If you must know, we are Corinthians by descent, like Bellerophon himself, and we speak Peloponnesian. Dorian women may lawfully speak Doric, I presume.

PRAXINOË. Lady Persephone! Never may we have more than one master. I am not afraid of *your* putting me on short commons.

CORGO. Hush, hush, Praxinoë—the Argive woman's daughter, the great singer, is beginning the *Adonis*, she that won the prize last year for dirge singing. I am sure she will give us something lovely. See, she is preluding with her airs and graces.

Well. The daughter of the Argive woman sang her psalm, and the show wore out its delights and splendours, and the merry ladies of Syracuse went home, and when the Idyll closes Madame Gorgo is, as the Parliamentary reporters used to say, *left speaking*. She is silent now, the dear creature, and has been for two-and-twenty centuries. Yet we may still hear her and her garrulous friend on any gala day in any modern city chattering gay nothings, as pleased and as prettily as any canary in its gilded cage.

Human nature, especially the more charming half of it, does not alter much. Theocritus is as modern as

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Anthony Hope. His Syracusan ladies are as much at home in the twentieth century A.D. as the ladies of *Punch* or Anatole France's novels. And we may assume, on the evidence of the cave paintings of Lerida, that they were very much the same a hundred thousand years before Theocritus was born.

In all ages women have delighted in gay and innocent gossip. They have loved adornment and good bargains and the excitement of the masque, the dance, and the pageant. They have attracted men by their softness and their sparkle, and have puzzled them by their abiding faith and transient petulance, their wayward affectations and innate sincerity. In all ages, and in all climes, for though East be East and West be West, woman still is woman. To prove it I will quote from a Chinese lady's letter to her husband, written in the nineteenth century:

All thy womenfolk have been shopping. We bought silks and satins and gay brocades, and returned home three happy, tired, hungry women, thinking with longing of the hissing tea urn upon the charcoal brazier. I am thy happy, tired wife.

She bought silks and satins and gay brocades, and came home longing for the hissing tea urn upon the charcoal brazier. She, the modern Celestial lady, Madame Kwei-li, would have been quite at home with the merry wives of Syracuse.

This should encourage us when pessimists declare that women will be unsexed by a new cut of skirt, or a jazz dance, or admission to the jury-box, or the university.

You may break, you may shatter the vase, if you will,
But the scent of the roses will hang round it still.

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I was about to say they would be charming women, all three, but see how I have given myself away. Theocritus, cunning Greek, has decoyed me into sighing over the demise of two seductive women who never existed. Such is the delusive power of genius. There never was any Gorgo, nor any Praxinoë. The real Macbeth was a good king who never handled the daggers. There was no Lady Macbeth, no Rosalind, no Falstaff, no Sancho Panza, no Marjorie Pendyce, no Micawber, no Mrs Nickleby. And yet we know these phantoms of the imagination better, and believe in them more devoutly, than we know or believe in the majority of women and men we have met or still meet in our daily lives.

Is not Bailie Nicol Jarvie as real to us as quaint old Ike? Is not the white-armed Nausicaa as real as Sappho? The men who cut our hair, measure us for our clothes, sell us our tea, what are they but simulacra, articulate human shapes with names to them? Whereas Praxinoë and Dogberry, and Panurge and the First Gravedigger are old friends, with whom we have laughed and made merry, whose whims and follies are as familiar to us as our own.

Those whom we meet in the shop or office seldom reveal themselves to us. We remember better the unguarded expressions or asking looks on the faces of casual passers-by in the street.

I passed a young French soldier in the Rue Cannebière, in Marseilles, ten years ago, and as we passed we exchanged a long, inquiring, holding gaze. I can recall his features and expression now, I who have forgotten the man with whom I dined last month. That poilu and I never exchanged a word, nor ever met again.

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But Denys, in *The Cloister and the Hearth*, has given me his confidence. I know his amorousness, his courage, his fidelity, his disarming *camaraderie*. “*Courage, mon ami, le diable est mort.*” How many of our flesh-and-blood acquaintances would toss me such an odorous “wild flower of speech” in the space of a week-end at a country house?

Browning’s “dear, dead women” never were born, yet we love and pity and believe in them; so that I need not apologize for my slip, but may continue to think of that pair of fresh and sweet Greek gossips, Mesdames Gorgo and Praxinoë, as pleasant ladies, “loved long since, and lost awhile.”

THE MEN OF WHITBY

ONE night in January 1881, during a tremendous storm, a brig struck on the sunken reefs within the southern arm of Robin Hood's Bay. The crew got out the jolly-boat, and made her fast with a rope to the mast of the wreck. All night long they fought with the waves, the people on shore being entirely ignorant of their calamity.

Early in the morning the quarter-board of the vessel, driven ashore, was seen by the coastguardsmen, who gave the alarm, and it was then discovered that the brig had foundered during the night, and that the crew were still tossing about in their boat exposed to the perils of a furious gale, a blinding snowstorm, and a heavy sea.

Now, at that time, the lifeboat at Robin Hood's Bay was old and unseaworthy. To put out in her was to incur swift and certain death. Neither could the brig's boat possibly make shore through the terrible breakers, even had her crew known the lay of the reefs, through which there are but two narrow channels where a boat may pass.

What was to be done? The good people of Robin Hood's Bay could not let the shipwrecked sailors drown before their eyes, and no ordinary boat could live in such a sea. There was but one chance—the telegraph. They wired to Whitby, requesting that the lifeboat might be sent at once.

The Whitby men received this message after having been out five times during the night. They held a consultation.

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The first suggestion was that the lifeboat should be towed round to Robin Hood's Bay, about ten miles, by steam tug; but this was impossible, as no tug could weather such a storm as then was raging.

The next suggestion was to man the lifeboat and pull round. This was put to the vote, and unanimously negatived. With the ebb tide and the furious gale against them, no boat's crew in the world could have taken the boat to the wreck, even if there had been a hope of living in that tremendous storm. The brave men of Whitby looked at the great cauldron of the sea, where the swirling water and the shrieking spray and flying snow were blent in one great seething hell-broth, and shook their heads despairingly.

And all this time the crew of the foundered ship, cut off from all communication with the shore, were fighting their hopeless battle for life, looking to the land they could not reach, and praying for the aid which could not come. And then—then, when all hope of going to the rescue by way of the sea had been abandoned—out spoke some hero of the Lifeboat Council on the Whitby beach, and said: "*We will take her overland.*"

They would take the lifeboat overland! Do you realize the magnitude of the task? The heroic audacity of the idea? Between Whitby and Robin Hood's Bay there are six long miles of hilly country. A lifeboat is a huge and ponderous vessel. A terrific storm was raging. There was a hard frost, and the roads were deep with snow.

On the face of it, the project looked like madness. But there was a boat's crew of sailors hoping against hope amongst the breakers; and British fishermen,

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having made up their minds to do a thing, bring desperate courage to face desperate emergencies.

The men of Whitby would take their lifeboat overland! The rumour spread. The crowd increased. The enthusiasm began to blaze. Old men, women, and children—the fathers, mothers, wives, daughters, and sons of fishermen—came out into the storm. The coxswain led the way to the boathouse, which was waist-deep in water, and the approach to which was swept every minute by the furious charges of the seas that rushed up the slips and over the pier.

It was a noble sight! The boat was dragged out. Ropes were made fast to it. A hundred, two hundred, three hundred men seized the ropes; a great crowd followed, pushing the carriage or turning the wheels. Through the falling snow and crackling ice, the flying spume and spray, the lifeboat was dragged down the quaint old street and over the narrow and steep bridge. At the turn of the road a couple of horses were yoked on; a few yards up the hill a couple more; a few yards farther a couple more; and so, as the procession went, were men and horses added to win the way against wind and weather.

One mile out a couple of travellers met the party, vowed the enterprise was hopeless; told how the roads were one mass of ice and snow, how they themselves had left their traps and horses half buried in the drifts; to get to the bay, they said, was quite impossible.

Impossible! Whitby was aroused. Whitby had got its blood up, the blood of the Vikings, who feared neither steel, nor storm, nor fire! Impossible! Whitby laughed.

Ahoy, there! A score of men! Two, three score of

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men, and quickly, with axes and bars and shovels. We will see about this snow, we men of Whitby; we will go, though the skies should fall.

The men were there—a hundred men with spades and axes; a hundred more with ropes and lanterns. They hewed the ice and cut the snow from the track; they grew more fierce and resolute the sterner grew the obstacles.

At every hamlet, at every farm and cross-road they picked up volunteers. Farmers and carriers met them with their cattle. Soon they had thirty horses, and of men a regiment. They dragged the great boat by main force up the steep hills, and through the ruts and puddles. They hacked their way through drifts and hedges; they pulled up gates and broke down walls, and so, panting, straining, heaving like giants, they hauled the lifeboat into the crowd at the top of the winding and abrupt declivity which leads to the beach of the bay.

Howl, demoniacal winds; rage, hungry waves around the fainting seamen in their broken boat! The Vikings are upon you, the men who brought the life-boat overland.

The steep road down to the shore is a mass of ice; the horses cannot stand upon it; the seas break fiercely over the wall. The men of Robin Hood's Bay come forward. They are Vikings, too. They lash the hind wheels of the carriage. They seize the ropes, the boat, the wheels, the sides, nine hundred lusty men, and they dash the thing down to the water with one mighty rush.

Then no time is lost. Swiftly the men of the crew are dressed, the boat is launched, and with a lurch and a plunge leaps bodily into the storm.

But all is not yet over. The sea is something

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tremendous; the coast is a mass of hidden reefs; and in a few minutes the lifeboat is hurled back, beaten, to the shore, with all the oars on one side broken, and half the crew exhausted or disabled.

It is three hours now since the men of Whitby formed their grand and daring resolution. All that time the crew of the sunken vessel have been holding on in hopeless desperation, knowing nothing of the efforts made on their behalf; hearing nothing but the shriek of the tempest and the thunder of the waves; seeing nothing but the vast, dark hillsides of water, the misty loom of the land, and the baffling veil of eddying snowflakes, whirling, whirling.

Eight men of the lifeboat's crew are out of action; eight volunteers take their places. Eight oars are shattered; eight more are shipped from the damaged boat belonging to the bay. A pilot also, a fisherman of the village, goes aboard, and again the boat is rushed into the billows.

Rescue or death these men will win. The boat must go, shall go; the blood of the Vikings is on fire; they would in their present temper fetch their comrades ashore though hell itself should gape.

Out again into the mirk and fury. Out in the boat they have carried overland. Out under the eyes of all the gallant men and brave women of the village. Out in the teeth of the tempest, into the roaring, rolling black-green valleys of the shadow of death. Now rising on the crest of some huge roller, now hidden from sight in some fearful, hissing pit, now hurled upon its beam ends by the sudden impact of a heavy sea, the Whitby boat fights its way towards the men who *shall* be rescued.

THE MEN OF WHITBY

Not till the lifeboat was close upon them had those desperate, clinging wretches any knowledge of the succour so heroically brought. Fainting with fatigue, perished with cold, still they hold on—stubborn, but hopeless. They cannot see the lifeboat, they cannot see the shore.

And now, now comes the glorious moment. We are upon them; we shall save them. No; they are giving way, they will be lost, and we within a hundred yards of them. The crisis is bitter in its intensity. The coxswain of the Whitby boat, Henry Freeman, turns to his crew, and in his great, deep voice cries: "Now, my lads, give them a rousing cheer"; and over the scream of the gale, and over the roar of the sea, and over the hiss of the brine, goes up the Vikings' shout, the shout of victory!

Oh, it was a glorious day! a strife of giants! a triumph of heroes! Imagine the delighted enthusiasm, the frantic excitement of the crowd when the shipwrecked crew were landed on that dangerous rocky shore, snatched from the very jaws of death—saved, saved to a man!—saved by the dauntless courage and magnificently heroic devotion of the fishermen of Whitby, who brought their lifeboat overland.

CINDERELLA

THERE are two wicker armchairs in the hall of the Hôtel Vert: one each side the entrance to the ladies' boudoir. They are conspicuous and large chairs with widespread and inviting arms, and are placed almost immediately under the arc light. It was in these chairs the sisters sat: two English women, dressed in black.

The plain sister took the chair on the left and the pretty sister the chair on the right of the door. The pretty sister was not pretty, really; she was one of those women who habitually look more than their best. The plain sister was frankly and unmistakably plain.

It was the contrast between these sisters, a contrast accentuated by their strong likeness to each other, which attracted my attention and held it.

The plain sister was certainly ten years senior to the pretty one; the pretty one would be twenty-eight. The younger had a husband, a grave, ungainly man, with pale blue eyes, and pale yellow hair, worn thin on the top. The elder was a spinster.

The pretty sister was in all visible essentials an improved copy of the plain one. She was a little taller, and a little plumper, with better shoulders, and a trimmer waist. Her black dress fitted her more perfectly; her hands were whiter; her complexion was fairer; she had more colour; her hair was darker, more plentiful, less neutral, of a chestnut shade. She had neat feet and neater shoes. She had two gold bangles; her sister none. She had a silver belt; her sister had a

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velvet band. She had two red roses at her breast; her sister never a flower.

The pretty sister was the gayer, though both were vivacious; she had a quicker, brighter, darker eye. When she smiled she turned her full lips up at the corners, while her sister turned her thin lips down.

The plain sister was reading Baedeker; the pretty one had a volume of Swinburne, from which she seemed to read passages now and again to her companion. There must have been quite two yards of space between their chairs, yet her sister seemed to hear what she was reading. When the quotations stopped the plain sister returned to Baedeker and the light died out of her eyes.

Presently the husband joined the ladies. He sat beside the pretty one, to whom he addressed most of his remarks. Both the ladies seemed amused by his conversation; but the plain one only smiled, whereas the pretty one often laughed. Presently a waiter was called. The husband then spoke to the pretty sister, who evidently translated the order. I noticed that it was always she who addressed the servants or officials of the hotel; the plain sister had no French. When the order was executed the plain sister took coffee; the pretty one took wine.

When the party retired the wife spoke to the lift attendant, the spinster collected the wraps and other feminine impedimenta. As they were about entering the lift another English couple came in and crossed the hall to speak to them. As I expected, the pretty sister gave them a bright and animated greeting, while the plain one provided her usual paler copy. The newcomers talked for a little, almost wholly to the pretty

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wife, who sparkled and rippled in her voluble replies. Then they parted, and the sisters went aloft while the husband strolled away to finish his cigar.

That is all my story. One might sit during such a little scene and conjure up romance and comedy out of the performance, but it seems that no vagary of the imagination is required in such a case. Here were two women, daughters of the same mother. One had prettiness, gaiety, and charm; the other was her foil, her unsuccessful echo. One had youth, talent, riches, a husband, troops of friends. The other was a spinster and a mere appendage to her triumph. What had the elder sister done to offend the gods? Why had Fortune dropped all the coins and *bonbons* in the younger's shoe?

If the elder sister had got the luck, would she have been still the plain one? If she had been the prettier sister, would her charms have brought the luck? Unto her that hath much shall more be given; but why? Surely Nature or the gods had been unfair. For if this were a matter of deserving one could not help but feel that the spoils had fallen as in life they so often do fall, to the more insistent and predatory spear.

One needed not two glances to discover that the prettier woman possessed more of what the economists call effective demand. It was the elder who would the sooner give way; it was the younger whose desire had the keener edge, whose hand more readily as well as more gracefully took the sweetest flower or the ripest peach. Husband, sister, friends, the world, and Fate conspired to make the easier way luxurious. Because she was the better armed, the fuller gifted, and more richly endowed of the two, all her circle acquiesced in the payment of the tribute she exacted. They strewed

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their blossoms in her path, they painted her lilies, and refined her gold; they brought her butter in a lordly dish.

This is an old trick of the world; it is an old twist in Fortune's favour against which the just, the pitiful, and the idealist have for centuries of centuries striven in vain. It is the old injustice of Heaven which Science has named "survival of the fittest."

What child reader of *Cinderella* has ever felt a pang for the ugly sisters? They were envious and harsh, those less favoured women; but, perhaps, to be ill-favoured does not conduce to amiability and magnanimity. And Miss Cinderella, with her little feet and her pretty face, did she merit all the opulence of love and riches heaped upon her? To be young; to be beautiful; to be charming; to be good; and, withal, to have small feet—are not these enough of blessings that to them must be added the prizes of a princely husband, a life of happiness ever after, and an immortality of juvenile sympathy and admiration?

What did the ugly sisters think? How could an ugly sister, with a chronic pain in her temper and big feet, be expected to fight against Fate, Nature, and a fairy godmother?

As I sat with my pipe and my coffee after those two sisters had gone to bed in the Hôtel Vert I began to ask myself these questions, and I resolved to speak for the ugly sisters just one word.

After all, how do we know that the history of Cinderella has not been garbled? If the historian or reporter of the period were personally acquainted with the ladies we may guess on whose side he would be. Cinderella, the pretty minx, would know how to

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bedevil a mere male person. Since the gods had given her beauty (and small feet), and a fairy godmother had given her a coach and horses and a dress that was a dream, and since the prince had given her his love and his hand, it is asking too much of human nature to ask the special reporter of the *Daily Calythumpian* of the period for justice.

Who will be just to the ugly, to the ineffectual, to the defeated; as against the beautiful, the successful, and the strong?

The two ladies I saw in the Hôtel Vert would have made an excellent subject for the subtle and delicate art of Henry James; but now that Thackeray is dead who shall write us the story of the Glass Slipper as told by Cinderella's elderly, ugly sister?

A CASUALTY

HERE of an evening, after the swallows have ceased their soft and friendly twittering, there is not a sound. We live in an old house, on high land. Looking north across the wooded valley, we can see the Surrey Hills and the tower on Leith Hill. Looking south, we see only the old garden, but we know that there is a gentle slope of meadow beyond the garden, and that from the top of that slope can be seen the Downs, and Chanctonbury Ring, and from Chanctonbury Ring can be seen a dreamy blue riband of mist, which is the English Channel.

Now, while we sit in the healing quietude of the old garden close by the open window of the room in which the piano stands silent, and where the old mirror gleams dully in the twilight, and as we enjoy the colour of the great pink lavatera and the perfume of Matthiola and mignonette, and while the rose-tinted western sky fades into warm violet, the window suddenly shivers. This is not quite the word. The glass gives a little shudder, not as from a shaking or a blow, but as if a ball of soft, heavy air had been driven against the pane.

There is not a sound. The apple-leaves hang motionless. The tall, crimson poppies are as still as though they were painted on the background of the dusk. But the glass shudders; shudders again, and we hold our breath.

It is the concussion of the guns in Flanders.

It was in the middle of this week of bright, hot

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sunshine and balmy airs, and I was trying to camouflage the horrors of war with a volume of Anatole France, when the lady of the house entered at door (right) and informed me that there was a lame pigeon on our greenhouse and the family did not know what to do with it.

I went out, and with the help of a neighbour and a ladder captured the bird and brought it in. It was an ordinary slate-coloured pigeon with an iridescent neck, a thin, keen face, and eyes like very hard and very bright red beads. It was lame of its left leg, but seemed otherwise unhurt.

But that was not all. Around its right leg was a cincture of flat metal bearing certain mysterious numbers and letters and cabalistic words. It was a carrier pigeon. Going or coming about its business, it had got hurt, and had, like a damaged aeroplane, been 'driven down.' But not, I hope, in enemy territory.

There was considerable excitement in the family circle. Billy, the duck, Georgie, the rooster, Satan, the cat, and even Erebus, the new kitten, all "paled their uneffectual fires" in the presence of the mysterious stranger. Punch turned green with jealousy: "Another of 'em," quoth Punch, and curled himself up on the lawn like the moody Dane.

"Where can he have come from?" "Where is he going to?" "Is he hurt?" "Can he fly?" "What shall we do with him?" "Isn't he sweet?" "Look at his dear red eyes!" "Is he a Government bird?" "Let me stroke his head." "He's frightened, poor dear." "I wonder whether he's a war pigeon." "Has he a letter under his wing?" "Shall we keep him?" "What can we give him to eat?"

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I put him in the apple-loft with some food and some water, and left him to rest.

He remained in the apple-loft and fed on sweet peas for three days, by which time he could walk on both feet. As he chose to sit on the windowsill and stare out wistfully at the blue sky and the tops of the larch-trees, we held a family council and decided that he was pining for his freedom. Wherefore I caught him, after a scramble, and carried him down on to the lawn. All the family assembled to see him start. Pa explained what would take place. "When I throw him up," said Pa, "he will fly round and round in widening circles, rising higher and higher, until he gets his bearings, and then he will go off as straight as an arrow."

"Oh, I wonder which way he will go." "Can he find his way?" "Fancy, if he makes north he will be in London in an hour." "Isn't it wonderful?" "Perhaps he will go to France." "Look out. Now—bing."

I threw him up. He flapped his wings and flew up into an oak-tree close by, where he sat down and combed his hair, and watched the rooks manœuvre, and the poultry scratching in the barnyard, and the cows lounging across the meadow. "Wait a bit," said Pa, "he'll be off directly."

Instead of which he sat in the one place all day, and in the evening came and roosted on the pergola close to the window of Ma's chamber.

The next day summer changed its mind. We had three days' drenching rain and cold, high winds. During the first of these the pigeon sat in one place in the wet

Next day Pa made him a house out of a box and

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fixed it on the roof of the porch over the back door. The bird sat outside the box all day in the rain and wolfed sweet peas. But that night there was a gale, and he took cover.

Meanwhile I wrote to the editor of a pigeon paper, who advised me to report my casualty to the police.

But we do not care to meddle with the police, and we began to like the bird, for he was a good deal of trouble. How? Oh, in various ways. For instance, he had a fancy for getting through the bedroom window and lying down to think on Ma's eiderdown quilt. This meant going upstairs and coaxing him out. "Don't frighten the poor thing." "Perhaps he's cold." "Don't try to catch him."

For ten days, rain or shine, our mysterious visitor sat or lay on the pergola or on the porch. As to flying, he seemed to have no more idea of flying than Punch. Satan watched him hopefully with her wicked green eyes. Punch wagged his tail and put his tongue out and asked him to come down and pretend to be a rat. But the bird just sat still in the rain or the sun and thought.

And then, one afternoon, he—he was not there. He is not there now. He has gone. No one saw him go, as no one saw him come. He never said good-bye, nor thank you, nor excuse me. He just—was not.

There are various theories in the family about this bird. We are fairly unanimous in the opinion that he was tired and hungry and lame; that he just sat or lay almost motionless for a whole fortnight, deliberately nursing himself, and then resumed his journey.

Pa, who is always profound, says that to be so tired he must have come a long way, and that to need so long

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a rest he must have known that he had still far to go. He was not, therefore, a Government bird from London, but most likely an Army bird from the Front.

After nursing this theory for a while we have, I think, adopted it, and we now make pictures in our mind of our silent and patient guest flying through the smoke and din of battle and perhaps alighting only to find himself in the enemy zone, a prisoner.

We like to think of him crossing the stormy Channel, flying straight for the Somme, alighting, perhaps, on a broken roof in Arras, welcomed back by some battle-scarred Tommy, taking his place amid his cooing mates, and then, with a message tied under his wing, going forth above the shrapnel and the gas clouds on some new adventure.

Meanwhile he has wangled all my sweet peas.

For better, for worse, our little guest has left us. And when we had wished him well we returned to our room and talked. It was very still and peaceful in the garden. It was very quiet and pleasant in our house. But every few minutes the window shuddered as though a ball of air had been thrown against the glass.

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